

THE POLL TAX AND THE BREAK UP OF LABOUR

SCOTLAND TODAY - THE U.K. TOMORROW

How would a future Kinnock government behave? You need only look to Scotland. Here Labour has 49 out of 72 MPs; outright control of every Region in the Central Belt, as well as a determining say in the 2 other large Regions, which altogether account for nearly 90% of Scotland's population. Labour controls all 4 major city councils. The Tories complain that the media is biased against them!

In Scotland the Tories have the same level of electoral support as the East German Communist Party. Yet the Tories confidently use Scotland to test out reactionary laws undermining legal rights, local democracy, state schooling and of course, the poll tax, before implementing them in England and Wales. Their confidence stems from Labour's active collaboration in Scotland, despite there being not a shred of a democratic mandate for Tory policies. Opposition rhetoric aside, in practice Labour behave as meekly as the East German C.P.'s satellite parties, before last November.

Labour Strathclyde has the biggest school closure programme in Britain. Labour Lothian were first to buy shares in newly privatised English water. Strathclyde's Labour leader, Charles Gray, is the Tories No.1 Poll Tax Farmer in Britain. This craven subordination to ruling class interests has been the hallmark of Labour in Scotland, despite the massive electoral majority they enjoy. This is exactly the behaviour we can expect from a Kinnock post-Policy Review government, or the 'pink Tories' as Eric Heffer has accurately described them.

It should come as no surprise that Labour find their new friends on Wall Street, in The City and the Police Federation. As Thatcher's policies fail the ruling class, their liberal wing has reasserted itself, and given open support to Labour. The ruling class turned to Labour to aid the Tories in every crisis through the 80's - the republican Hunger Strike, the inner city riots, the Falklands War, the Miners' Strike and now the Poll Tax Rebellion. Kinnock hasn't been averse to attacking Thatcher from the right, as over the Zircon Affair and Hong Kong immigration. So serious consideration is being given in ruling class circles to upgrading Labour, from mere Tory agents, to the ruling class's chosen government party. This offers them more flexibility in combatting growing working class resistance. Bob Hawke's Australian Labour Party is their model.

LABOUR PARTY - DISORGANISERS OF THE WORKING CLASS.

Forced with the overwhelming evidence of their real role, socialists should have long made a decisive break with Labour. Yet there are still many who see it as 'our' party, which just happens to be in the wrong hands. This is fundamentally wrong. 'Our' representatives are protected by bureaucracy and political bans, policed by party and union officials; by autonomy for the parliamentary party and by the union officials' block vote. But there is no such wall between the MPs,

councillors, officials and the many sinecures, consultancies, knighthoods and lordships!

The Labour Party now represents the aspirations of a career hungry New Middle Class - the lower and middle management of the local and national state bureaucracies; significant numbers in academia and the mass media; the new career union officials. The ruling class turn to the Labour Party as their 'fire and theft' party, their liberal alternative. The Labour Party is the ruling class's political weapon for disorganising the working class. Those socialists inside are trapped in a permanent Popular Front, where working class interests must be sacrificed to the needs of other classes.

AN OPENING FOR A NEW WORKING CLASS PARTY

However, in Scotland we now have the biggest campaign of civil disobedience since the Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland. This has increasingly exposed the real nature of the Labour Party. It has also increasingly exposed the positions of Labour Party's internal and external factions - particularly Militant and the SWP.

Workers in Scotland have bypassed Militant's belief that massive resistance would swell the ranks of Labour, bringing a marxist Left to leadership. As working class resistance has grown the Labour Party has moved to the Right! They have also ignored the SWP's doom and gloom ridden Downturn Theory, which says that workers will only support Labour. Workers in Scotland have shown a growing willingness in Scotland to confront Labour collaboration, through civil disobedience and electoral challenge.

The main party to benefit from this has been the opportunist SNP. Nevertheless the spectacular toppling of a 19,000 Labour majority, in overwhelmingly working class Govan, shows that workers are prepared to break with Labour for more radical policies. In the recent Regional elections 5 independent Anti-Poll Tax candidates stood, in areas as varied as the Shetlands, Grampian, Fife and Lothian. Their votes varied between 21-34% - a higher average than the Greens, Democrats, Tories or SNP, in the seats the parties contested! There could have been an even more effective challenge if there hadn't been such strong opposition from the Labour apologists in Militant and the SWP.

There is no way forward for socialists in trying to prop-up, reform or capture the Labour Party. Those who insist on clinging to Labour are like the Lib-Labs at the turn of the century. The way forward lies in the break-up of Labour. The most exciting prospect opened up by the Poll Tax Rebellion is the prospect of a new working class party. Socialists must not miss this opportunity.

We wish to apologise to the Newtongrange and Mayfield groups, which we omitted to mention last month, as helpers in Keith Simpson's electoral campaign.

The United Front - More essential than ever

After the local elections, everybody, (ourselves included) expected the war on non-payers would be stepped up. Labour, with the elections safely behind them, would proceed to warrant sales. But all is apparently quiet. So what is happening?

Now that the Scottish local authorities are publicly admitting to a poll tax shortfall of £170M, the ruling class realise that they can not break this level of resistance just by pursuing warrant sales, bank and income arrests.

They have had to devise a new strategy. Central to this is breaking the challenge represented by the Federations - the most organised section of the non-payers. They have looked into the lessons they learned in Northern Ireland, in their attempt to break the Civil Rights Campaign. Their strategy involved intimidation, political witch-hunting and criminalisation.

The first fruit of this new strategy was the 'Met' attack on the March 31st. London demo. This has been followed by a 125 strong police task force, scouring the country, preparing for 'show trials'. They have also tried to intimidate campaigners, through dawn raids, seizing personal belongings and phone numbers, then releasing those arrested without charge. Next week in Lothian, the Chief Procurator has decided to proceed with a 'show trial' against the 'Lothian 17'.

However, to increase their effectiveness, the ruling class need time to regroup their forces. This means once more cementing together that old trusty in times of crisis - the Broad Right alliance of Thatcher and Kinnock. There is no more room for the 'New Tokenists' - Campbell Christie, Alex Falconer, George Galloway and Co. Their personal non-payment stance failed to prevent the mass unofficial campaign from getting off the ground. So now a stepped up anti-Militant witch-hunt is being used to silence the 30 non-paying Labour MPs. (Yes it is as miserably low a figure as that)

How do we respond to this? First we must also use this time to broaden our support. The Militant controlled Federations now only cover a third of those in organised campaigns. Beyond the organised still lie the majority of non-payers.

At a conference of anti-poll tax activists in Sheffield, organised by the independent 3D alliance a country wide pattern began to emerge. The barrier to further expansion was Militant's obsessive desire to control. The 3 independent members on the All-Britain Steering Committee revealed that Militant only planned for 30,000 on the London demo. This was the maximum number, Militant could cope with alone. The June 23rd. Trade Union Conference was organised without telling the independent Trade Union Officers! Many regions have experienced the problem of Militant setting up groups mainly to get delegates. Where this tactic has failed Militant have set up breakaway groups in some areas. The Militant dominated Scottish Federation Conference was the same bureaucratic travesty we saw last year, despite promises of democratic debate.

There is a growing contradiction between the massive numbers not paying, who need to be more involved, and the much smaller number a group like Militant feel they can still control. Hence Militant's panic response to every independent initiative. Last month Lothian Federation delegates witnessed Militant's sectarian opposition to the independent Trafalgar Square Defence Campaign (TSDC).

Yet the TSDC has attempted to involve all those arrested on March 31st. It has quickly established itself and has gained national publicity. Compare this to the lack of progress on the 'Lothian 17'. We desperately need a 'Lothian 17' Campaign, where all those arrested are actively working together, to widen support.

The best answer to ruling class anti-Militant witch-hunting is to make every anti-poll tax organisation, from the local groups, to the regional, Scottish and All-Britain Federations genuine United Fronts - not merely Tendency Fronts. Then involvement would increase and financial support would also grow. But most of all this would stop the present ruling class build-up to political marginalisation and victimisation of the organised non-payers, in its tracks.

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